

The Role of the Pericardium Primary Channel: An Ode to Transpersonal Awareness, Part I

Nicholas Sieben, LAc

One of the gifts of Classical Chinese Medicine is its multidimensional view of the human system: the body, the mind and so-called "spirit." Some traditions refer to these aspects as "levels" of the body. Others, like the Western medical tradition still see them as largely separate from one another.

Within the classical writings of Chinese Medicine, aspects of the spirit, mind and emotions are discussed alongside that of the physical. In many cases, mental and emotional aspects of health and disease are implied, spoken about through physical metaphor. We as Westerners must often translate the "Eastern" way of thinking (the "oneness" of body-mind-spirit) into our highly compartmentalized view of the world. When diagnosing our patients as Chinese medical clinicians, we may ask ourselves: is this a mental issue, a physical issue, a spiritual issue? This is perhaps why applicability of therapies like acupuncture can be confusing to many people, especially when relating to mental and emotional issues.

How can a therapy that works on the physical body affect non-physical aspects of the human system? There are many explanations for this: blood chemistry affecting brain chemistry, via the endocrine system, etc. Perhaps the truest answer to this question is: there's really no separation between the physical body and the mind. We hear this statement quite a lot within the Eastern medical traditions. So much so that it can sound a bit "airy-fairy." But what does it really mean? How can we digest this concept with our Western minds so we can share it with our patients: many of whom have little awareness of this concept.

As with much of our medicine, the truest cultivation is through experience, not necessarily through intellectualization. Many patients only come to "trust" acupuncture treatment after experiencing it. The thought of any concept means little without the experience. As practitioners, we are fortunate to experience Chinese Medicine daily through working with our patients.

We diagnose through our senses. Most acupuncturists are not looking at blood tests or X-rays to form Chinese medical diagnoses. We feel pulses, look at complexions and tongues, feel abdomens. Some of us even listen to the voice, smell odors, or see auras. We use our minds, connecting what we're feeling and seeing with knowledge gained from our scholarly medical training.

There's always an element of intuition to what we do. We "feel" our patients, and learn to trust what we are sensing. Every aspect we are gathering from the senses becomes part of our overall impression of the patient, to be used in the process of healing.

In the end, who can say what caused what? Did mental patterns cause inflammation, creating physical changes; did an endocrine imbalance create the mental disturbance; is it nature or nurture: part of the constitutional personality, or a learned behavior? Is the issue a consequence of lifestyle choices, or part of the patient's destiny? A "judgment" from heaven, an invasion from a "gui" (ghost) or "gu" (parasite), or part of the "Ming" (heavenly mandate) meant to cultivate

wisdom? Is the problem because the world is "attacking" the patient, or is it the patient's reaction to "what is"?

With Chinese Medicine, we are asked to go beyond a one-dimensional, or even two-dimensional view of the world. We are asked to hold many views at once. Most of us have struggled with this during our training. We want the security of learning the "right" way, the "best" way. Many Chinese Medical traditions like to argue who is superior, the better way: TCM vs. CCM vs. Worsley Style, etc.. Some like to debate what is best to focus on in treatment: the "spirit" first and foremost, the mind, or just the reliable physical body. All this debate can be a fun intellectual endeavor. Yet, our view becomes much greater when we can "hold" many points of view at once.

When treating our patients, it's helpful to look inside ourselves as practitioners, inquiring into where we are coming from. Are we working with them through our personalities? Through a state of judgment or conflict? Are we looking at our medicine from the point of view of our personalities? For example, a "Wood" person wants to see a linear trajectory: how point A leads to point B; a "Metal" person wants it all to be clearly ordered, focusing on the present moment; a "Water" person is okay with the chaos of it all.

Having a personality is part of being human. It informs the way we see the world. However it can also limit our perception if we allow ourselves to become rigidly trapped by it. It is implied in the *Nei Jing* that conflict is endemic to having a personality. This is best illustrated on the physical body by the Bladder Shu points.

In Chapter 51 of the *Ling Shu* and Chapters 53 and 54 of the *Nan Jing*, the Bladder Shu points are presented as following the "Control Cycle." They represent the materialization of life. They are born out of the *Jing* of the Kidneys. As described in Chapter 36 of the *Nan Jing*, the Bladder Shu are created and fed by essential "yuan" *qi* via the Triple Heater mechanism. They are organized as Metal above, Fire, Wood, Earth and Water below. Fire controls Metal, Wood controls Earth, Earth controls Water.

Basic Taoist philosophy describes the materialization of form: the "one" (chaos) becomes "two" (duality), which becomes the "three," which then gives birth to the myriad of all things. The *Jing* (source) manifests into two Kidneys, from which arises the Triple Heater ("three"), which gives birth to Five Elements that encompass all things. The Five Elements are organized as a generative cycle and also as a control cycle. There is nurturing support amongst some elements and antagonist checks-and-balances between others.

Essential *qi* irrigates the Bladder Shu to form our personality. Some elements conflict. For example, Metal and Fire have a Control Cycle relationship: they balance and conflict with one another. Metal and Fire personality types may not get along with one another, as they have a naturally antagonistic relationship. They see the world through opposing viewpoints.

We must honor our personalities. They are part of our "Ming": the heavenly mandate, asking us to live out our lives through the personality we've been given. The Classics say the personality can be controlled, but it can never be changed. However, there are inferences in the classics that it's possible to go beyond the limits of our personality and experience the world from a different perspective.

Many of us have little idea what it means to perceive and act outside of our personalities. Yet, the Chinese Medical classics are filled with references to healers who were able to do this. Acupuncture, classically referred to as a "compass" for the soul ("*Ling Shu*"), is a medium by which a person can cultivate this ability. The acupuncture channels are encoded with philosophical

wisdom, including the possibility for going beyond the personality into a state of "interpersonal" or "luminous" awareness.

If we look at the flow of the 12 Primary Channels, they have a sequence. They can be looked at as a study of human development. Following the Bladder and Kidney Channels are the Pericardium and Triple Heater. Philosophically, the stage of the Pericardium is an invitation to transform into a "trans-personal" person.

We begin life as a survival-motivated being, as represented by the first four Primary Channels: the Lungs/Large Intestine and Stomach/Spleen. We need to be able to breathe, eat-digest, have immunity and the capacity to rebuild our bodies through sleep.

Once we are "self-surviving," we can engage in exploration of the world via the Heart/Small Intestine and how it relates to our "self" via the Bladder/Kidney. We go out into the world to gather information, experiences and impressions, and bring it all back into ourselves. From there, we begin to formulate our view of the world: what we like and don't like, who we think we are, as well as our world view. This occurs through the final four channels in the Primary Channel sequence: Pericardium/Triple Heater and Gallbladder/Liver.

The Pericardium is a channel that helps maintain sanity. It is our ability to rationalize. Mental health is reliant upon healthy balance between the Heart and Kidneys: Fire and Water, which the Pericardium and Triple Heater represent. Fire and Water are a control cycle: a conflict in relationship to what we want and what the world expects of us. For many of us, our personalities become a solidification of who we think we must be to maintain a sense of social survival. We must harmonize between what the world demands of us and what we desire in a way that keeps us safe and sane. This is the role of the Pericardium and Triple Heater.

The level of Pericardium can be a major event in the spiritual development of human consciousness. Like all the channels, the Pericardium has a dual nature. It can evolve into a state of extreme stubbornness: the inability to see beyond the rigid, judgmental view of the individual self; being trapped by our personalities. This can create an inability to interact with others at a "heart-level," as represented by its Luo Vessel.

The acupuncture points on the Pericardium channel have evocative names: Tian Chi "Heavenly Pool," *Tian Quan* "Heavenly Spring," Da Ling "Great Mound," Lao Gong "Palace of Toil," *Zhong Chi* "Center of Chong," *Jian Shi* "The Intermediary." An entire book could be written on each of these points. However, looked at collectively, the Pericardium channel appears to invoke a theme of "return" to "heaven," to "the blueprint" (represented by the Extraordinary channel Chong Mai).

We can become hardened into a rigid "self," with a stubborn perspective on the world, as illustrated by the Pericardium's Luo Point Nei Guan "Inner Barrier." We can bury inharmonious perceptions which may have disturbed our sense of sanity into *Da Ling* "The Great Mound."

We may try with all our resources to make something work in our life, even though it keeps falling apart. We may bring ourselves into a state of "Lao" (consumption) in the process, unable to let go of our all-consuming desire for "what we want how we want it" - the point *Lao Gong* "Palace of Toil". These disappointments may pain our heart so much that we have a major crisis, maybe even an attack of the heart, represented by the "master" of all xi cleft points Xi Men "Gate of the Xi Clefts." Cloudiness of vision can result, condensing into a marsh: *Qu Ze* "Marsh at the Bend."

It is natural for the Pericardium and Triple Heater to create a degree of individuality. Spiritual development occurs through this process, as described philosophically by the Heart's Primary

Channel. As we develop, we create a sense of individual nature, aware of our own agenda in life. We begin to feel we must protect ourselves against others: their beliefs, wishes and actions. We reduce our world from being an "ocean" of "Ultimate Possibilities" to a smaller "sea," represented by the acupuncture points Heart-1 *Ji Quan* "Ultimate Spring" moving into Heart-2 *Qing Ling* "Blue-Green Soul" into Heart-3 *Shao Hai* "Lesser Sea."

From the "Ultimate," we develop our agenda and our direction, represented by the Wood Element. (Blue and Green are colors classically associated with Wood.) Wood represents direction: what we're doing with our time and space. From this agenda our individual life manifests: a "Lesser (*Shao*) Sea." *Shao* refers to *Shao Yin*: Fire and Water, Heart and Kidney, the level of Humanity. We move away from ultimate possibilities and the ability to embrace all things. We start limiting ourselves to what we like and don't like, what we believe and don't believe. We surround ourselves with people and circumstances that validate our view of the world. We begin to reject things that don't agree with our viewpoint. The world becomes smaller, and so do we.

The Heart Channel is the "code" to unlock the Pericardium. All points along the Primary Channels are sequenced in such a way to present a philosophical statement. Heart-1 to Heart-9 is a journey from original oneness into individuality and separateness, through the difficulties of life as a "survival-motivated being" into the spiritual awakening.

According to Chinese medical scholar and Taoist priest Jeffrey Yuen, the Pericardium is a "bridge" that allows "metamorphosis" into the spiritual experience. He defines the "spiritual experience" as where "the outer-directed, ego-struggling, survival-motivated person changes into a natural-directed person." The person is directed back "to the nature of his being." What's created, says Yuen, is "a sense of spontaneity...the ego no longer has to be the component to struggle with. Now, the struggle is to maintain and sustain the integrity of the soul. Spirituality is not survival-motivated consciousness. It transcends the survival-motivated consciousness, into consciousness that is trans-personal-motivated: motivation to go beyond oneself."

That which Yuen is describing is similar to teachings discussed by many ancient spiritual traditions, including Buddhism and various Native American Shamanistic traditions: the ability to go beyond the self, returning to a state of "oneness" with all things. The "me vs. them" separateness which can characterize pathology of the Pericardium transforms into an expanded state of consciousness: the ability to be an individual "me" and also "all things." Within this state of being there is no conflict. This is the realm of unconditional love and acceptance.

When the heart "opens," personalities remain (for oneself and others), yet they no longer become a barrier to connection. This is the stage within the Heart Channel where we enter *Shen Men* (Heart-7) and are asked to let go of our baggage via *Shao Fu* (Heart-8) - all the things we've accumulated and seen as our "self." We begin to see the world as something other than just form, allowing us to loosen our grip. The result is *Shao Chong* (Heart-9). Described through Buddhist terminology, our karma becomes "lesser." To use a concept presented in *Quechuan Shamanism*, we begin to see the world through a state of "luminosity," instead of through our egos. All of which makes sense, as the internal branch of the Heart's Primary Channel is said to travel into the eyes to effect the brain.

Acupuncture is about more than alleviating physical symptoms. As suggested by the *Ling Shu*, it can act as a "compass" for the soul. As I learn more about ancient civilizations, especially the more Shamanic ones, I see medics and priests were often one and the same.

There is classification of healers detailed in the *Su Wen*: the *Yi* are the medical doctors, *Fang Shi* are the teachers, and *Wu* are the Shaman healers. *Fang Shi* impart to their clients a way of living

that will bring about health, through knowledge. The Yi are scientifically-oriented, interested in physiology and pathology. The Wu are more mystical, communicating with other dimensions for the benefit of those they are trying to help. All types have a role and value within the community. Some people require physical intervention to correct purely physiological or structural issues. Others are looking for knowledge through mental cultivation: ways to live healthier lives through conscious choice. In some cases, physical or mental intervention is unable to reach the "level" in which the patient is suffering/cultivating. They must be touched by a healer who can lead them beyond the limits of their bodies and minds. In these cases, there's a need to work at the level of the soul.

Our society becomes greater when we can embrace all types of healers and healing. When we become aware of "ultimate possibilities" within the healing process, our clinical practice becomes richer. Our own cultivation as healers can involve learning to embody these different aspects. More and more, patients are asking for something more than the support of a physical doctor. They seek the redemptive support of the teacher and Shaman. All of this is contained within Chinese Medicine. The acupuncture channels become guidebooks for our own cultivation. They teach us ways to embody our roles as physical technicians, mental-emotional supporters, teachers and also spiritual guides. We cultivate through our clinical practices.

Part two of this article will continue exploration into "opening" the Heart through the acupuncture channels. Theories from 19th Century Chinese medical clinician *Wang Qing-Ren* add to the importance of the Pericardium. *Qing-Ren* describes the role of the Pericardium as a bridge allowing access into the Curious Organs. His theory shows the close relationship between the Heart-Pericardium and Brain, and its clinical significance in creating major shifts in the level of *Jing*. Part two also discusses in greater detail the role of the Collaterals (Luo Vessels and Divergent Channels) in this process.

References:

1. Alcoholics Anonymous. AA Services, 1939.
2. Cecil-Sterman, Ann. *Advanced Acupuncture*. Classical Wellness Press, 2013
3. Jarret, Lonny. *Nourishing Destiny*. Spirit Path Press, 1998.
4. Liansheng, Wu; Qi Wu (translators). *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Internal Medicine*. China Science & Technology Press.
5. Qing-Ren, Wang (Translation by Yushin Chung, Herman Oving and Simon Becker). *Yi Lin Gai Cao (Correcting Errors in the Forest of Medicine)*. Blue Poppy Press, 2007.
6. Shou-Zhong, Yang; Chace, Charles (Translators). (2008). *The Systemic Classic of Acupuncture and Moxabustion (Jia Yu Jing)*. Blue Poppy Press.
7. Unschuld, Paul U. (Translator). (1986). *Nan Jing: The Classic of Difficult Issues*. University of California Press.
8. Yuen, Jeffrey. *Channel Systems of Chinese Medicine: Divergent Channels*. New England School of Acupuncture, December 21-22, 2002.
9. Yuen, Jeffrey. *Channel Systems of Chinese Medicine: Luo Vessels*. New England School of Acupuncture, 2004.
10. Yuen, Jeffrey. *Channel Systems of Chinese Medicine: Extraordinary Vessels*. New England School of Acupuncture, April 12-13, 2003.
11. Yuen, Jeffrey. *Curious Organs*. New England School of Acupuncture, June 21, 2003.
12. Yuen, Jeffrey. *Lecture on Jing Bie/Divergent Channels: The Humors and Their Relationship to Zang-Fu*, June 19 - 20, 2010 at Chinatown Wellness Center, NY,NY.
13. Yuen, Jeffrey. *Lecture on Jing Bie/Divergent Channels and Their Treatment Strategies*, October 9 - 10, 2010 at Chinatown Wellness Center, NY,NY.
14. Yuen, Jeffrey. "Lecture on Early Acupuncture - Huang Fu-Mi's Jia Yi Jing" at Chinatown Wellness Center, NY, NY. March 14-15, 2009.
15. Yuen, Jeffrey. "Lecture on Early Acupuncture: Ling Shu" at Chinatown Wellness Center, NY,

- NY. February 15-16, 2009.
16. Yuen, Jeffrey. "Lecture on Eight Extraordinary Vessels" at Chinatown Wellness Center, NY, NY, November 6-7, 2010.
 17. Yuen, Jeffrey. "Lecture on Luo Vessels" at Chinatown Wellness Center, NY, NY, March 20-21 and April 17-18, 2010.
 18. Yuen, Jeffrey. "Lecture on the Primary Channels" at the Chinatown Wellness Center, June 20-21, 2009.
 19. Yuen, Jeffrey. "Lecture on the Sinew Channels" at the Chinatown Wellness Center, June 20-21, 2009.
 20. Yuen, Jeffrey. Light on the Essence of Chinese Medicine: The Ling Shu. New England School of Acupuncture, December 16, 2000.
 21. Yuen, Jeffrey. Light on the Essence of Chinese Medicine: The Nan Jing. New England School of Acupuncture, June 30, 2001.
 22. Yuen, Jeffrey. Light on the Essence of Chinese Medicine: The Su Wen. New England School of Acupuncture, June 24, 2000.
 23. Yuen, Jeffrey Three Spirits Seven Souls. The New England School of Acupuncture, June, 2003.

AUGUST 2013